

Documents on Diplomacy: Lessons

A Broken Constitution: The Articles of Confederation

Note to Teacher: This activity is an introduction to *Section II: Diplomacy under the Articles of Confederation*. Subsequent lessons are devoted to specific diplomatic dilemmas and primary documents relevant to the era when the Articles of Confederation was the governing constitution for the United States. Some lessons use single documents, others multiple documents. It is intended that the teacher may use all or only selected lessons or even parts of lessons.

Standard: I. Culture
 II. Time, Continuity, and Change
 III. People, Places, and Environments
 V. Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
 VI. Power, Authority, and Governance
 VII. Production, Distribution, and Consumption
 IX. Global Connections
 X. Civic Ideals and Practices

Grade Level: 9–12

Objectives: The student will:

- Read a primary document critically
- Determine essential constitutional needs for conducting foreign policy
- Evaluate why the Articles of Confederation failed to establish proper national powers of diplomacy
- Apply knowledge of primary document to historical scenarios

Time: 1–2 class periods (based on selected Procedures)

Materials: Documents: **1781** *The Articles of Confederation*
 1781 *Excerpts from the Articles of Confederation*

Resources: *Briefing Memo: Diplomacy under the Articles of Confederation*

Exercises: *At a Glance*
 Foreign Policy Scenarios

Procedures:

- 1.** Have students read the *Briefing Memo: Diplomacy under the Articles of Confederation* as preparation for analysis of the Articles. Identify and briefly discuss the diplomatic distresses of the new United States.
- 2.** Distribute copies of the document, *The Articles of Confederation*, and the exercise, *At a Glance*. Students may work individually, in pairs, or small groups.
- 3.** Have students match the items listed in *At a Glance* with the appropriate Article of the Articles of Confederation. Discuss findings.

4. Determine if the national government had enough power to conduct foreign policy.
5. Divide students into groups if not done previously. Distribute the Exercise, *Foreign Policy Scenarios* and the Document, *Excerpts from the Articles of Confederation*. Each group is the Confederation Congress. Discuss how the Congress would deal with these scenarios. Find evidence in the Articles to validate the authority of Congress. Have each group present its conclusions.

Extension Activity:

1. Provide students with the following roles:
 - a. Citizen of Virginia
 - b. French merchant
 - c. Settler living west of the Appalachian Mountains
 - d. John Jay, Secretary of Foreign Affairs

Have students, according to their assigned roles, express their opinions of the Articles of Confederation.

2. Read or display this quote from John Jay from *An Address to the People of New York on the Subject of a Federal Constitution*, who served as Secretary of Foreign Affairs, May 7, 1784—March 4, 1789.

The Congress under the Articles of Confederation may make war, but are not empowered to raise men or money to carry it on—they may make peace, but without power to see the terms of it observed—they may form alliances, but without ability to comply with the stipulations on their part—they may enter into treaties of commerce, but without power to [e]nforce them at home or abroad...—In short, they may consult, and deliberate, and recommend, and make requisitions, and they who please may regard them.

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Have students list the powers Jay described as nonexistent. Which of these powers might have proved most intolerable to Jay? Explain choices. ■